

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES OF THE PRESENTATION

[\(First the Story!\)](#)

In his thought-provoking guide to contemplative prayer entitled, *Noisy Contemplation*, Jesuit William Callahan offered a beautiful way to get in touch with the power of the Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospels. He suggested praying the Scriptures by entering into the story either as a conscious observer or even as an active participant in the narrative. My passion for the stage would often lead me to see these stories as theatre.

The ancient Jewish tradition of presenting the first born in a ritual consecration to the Lord which is celebrated in the Sacred Stories proclaimed today offers a case in point. This tradition has significance for us especially in what I would consider the cast of characters of this Scriptural drama. In a prologue of sorts, we hear from the prophet Malachi, the Psalmist and the author of the letter to the Hebrews.

Malachi reminds us that the Messiah will be announced in a profound, even startling way:

*For he is like the refiner's fire...
Refining them [us] like gold or like silver....*

Following this awesome announcement, the Psalmist offers a mantra in the form of a rhetorical question which we chanted:

*Who is this king of glory?
It is the Lord!*

Then the letter to the Hebrews counters with urging us to see clearly that this king, who will rescue us from the clutches of sin and death, will come to us as one like us: a human being, who

*... had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way,
that he might expiate the sins of the people.*

And so with this tantalizing prologue, our drama begins!

Enter Mary and Joseph with their infant son. They come to the temple to honor their faith tradition, and, in thanksgiving, offer their child back to God. They come in poverty: their humble offering: two turtledoves and two young pigeons is the all they can afford. We are struck by this young couple's humility, their piety, their devotion.

They are greeted by an elderly man who is “just and pious.” Not an official of the temple, but simply a faithful Jew steeped in the hope offered in the prologue to this little drama. He senses something in this young couple’s faith and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, announces in a powerful soliloquy the conflicted future for this child and his young mother’s involvement in that destiny. The young couple understandably marvels at these proclamations. Enter Anna, an elderly prophet who offers her own take on this infant’s future as intimately bound up with the promise of the entire chosen people.

Our little drama ends with Mary and Joseph returning with their infant son to their home in Nazareth to nourish and nurture him so that he

*grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;
and the favor of God was upon him.*

For us, this little drama can hold a treasure of contemplative prayer. First, from that stunning “prologue” we could reflect on the longing for the Messiah by prophet and psalmist and compare it to our own longing to be one with him in Word and Sacrament. We could spend some time

marveling at the wonder expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews of our savior's love and desire to make us one with him by becoming one like us! Again this can lead us to a deeper meaning of and appreciation for the Eucharist when we actually become more deeply one with him.

Secondly, the three episodes of the drama of the Presentation itself also offer a source for contemplation in the spirit of William Callahan's *Noisy Contemplation* especially in using the imagination to enter into each aspect of the drama. For example, we could simply reread the Gospel passage as a conscious observer—as if we are actually there in the temple. Or since I believe prayer should be an enjoyable experience not a penance (!) -- we could imagine ourselves as reporters interviewing each of the characters, asking questions, pressing for answers that would pique the curiosity of our readers or viewers, being sure to allow our imaginations to answer those questions in the voice of each character! Journaling this experience would also be a very fruitful prayer experience! “Noisy Contemplation” is, after all, all about letting your imagination be guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures of this feast reveal the power of our God to purify us like a refiner's fire, the compassion of the Son of God to transform us in his image, and the grace of the Holy Spirit to assure us of God's enduring presence in our lives.

There is so much to nourish our prayer life and our faith in this beautiful drama of the Presentation. Enjoy!

Can you relate to the potential prayer experiences offered in this homily?

What prayer might you compose based on the Scriptures of this feast?

Can you relate to any of the characters of the Gospel story?